

VZCZCXRO1762
PP RUEHMR
DE RUEHKI #0853 1501556
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301556Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3984
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0008
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000853

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: MONUC CONFIRMS CAPTURED PEACEKEEPERS
ARE ALIVE

REF: KINSHASA 851

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) MONUC sources told PolOff May 30 they have verified that the seven Nepalese peacekeepers captured during operations May 28 (reftel) are alive and being held by militia leader Peter Karim. According to MONUC officials, MONUC is working with a group of intermediaries in Ituri to make contact with Karim and his militia to ensure the release of the peacekeepers. Among these intermediaries are local community leaders and a demobilized ex-combatant from the Front for National Integration (FNI) militia, with whom MONUC has worked before and is deemed "credible and trustworthy" by MONUC officials. This group has reportedly seen the captured peacekeepers and has told MONUC the seven are alive and in good condition.

¶2. (C) While the militia initially demanded USD 20,000 per peacekeeper for their release, Karim and his group have now apparently reduced their demand to USD 7,000 per person. In response, MONUC has reportedly sent the message back to Karim that they will not pay any ransom money. In addition, MONUC demanded the peacekeepers be released immediately, unharmed, and without conditions. So as to facilitate a release, MONUC has reduced its operations tempo in the region so as not to "spook" the militia and make them think MONUC is planning an imminent attack. MONUC officials said, however, they have forces on standby to conduct military operations against Karim and his militia, if necessary. MONUC officials, though, said they are "cautiously optimistic" the situation can be resolved peacefully, perhaps as soon as today. MONUC Force Commander General Patrick Cammaert is currently overseeing the MONUC response team from Bunia.

¶3. (C) Additional pressure has been brought on Karim from members of the Lendu ethnic community in Ituri. According to MONUC officials, the chief of the Lendu community in Ituri sent a note to Karim (who is also Lendu) demanding that he release the captives immediately. The Lendu chief reportedly told Karim in his letter that the situation will only anger the international community and bring nothing but problems to the community.

¶4. (C) Meanwhile, MONUC military officials continue to believe the operational security of the mission was compromised, thereby leading to the capture of the peacekeepers. According to one MONUC military official, information gathered from the debriefing of the wounded MONUC troops indicates the attack was a planned ambush. MONUC officials say they have no leads as to the source of the leak, but noted the culprit likely comes from the Congolese

military. Post will continue to monitor the situation.
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